

Hotel Astor  
1511-1515 Broadway  
New York  
New York County  
New York

HABS No. NY-5464

HABS  
NY,  
31-NEYO,  
72-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
801 19th Street N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20006

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. NY-5464

## HOTEL ASTOR

HABS  
NY,  
31-NEYO,  
72-

Location: 1511-1515 Broadway, between West 44th Street and West 45th Street, New York, New York County, New York.

Present Owners: Henry H. Minskoff, Jerome Minskoff, Myron Minskoff, and Ostar Properties Inc.

Present Use: Undergoing demolition; to be replaced by a high-rise office building designed by Kahn & Jacobs.

Statement of Significance: Shortly before the opening of the Hotel Astor in 1904, the owner, William Waldorf Astor, predicted in The New York Times that the new building would be "the finest hotel in the world." Lavishness and elegance were apparent throughout the building, from the richly ornamented exterior to the carefully decorated public rooms and guest accommodations. The hotel was acclaimed for its fire-proof construction and for its many technical innovations, including an incinerator, thermostats in every room, and cool air-conditioning.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Legal description of property: Before erection of the hotel, the lots which the building was to occupy were numbered 29 through 36. After erection of the building, the entire property became known as lot 36.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Grantor</u>	<u>Grantee</u>
10/11/1897 Liber 62, page 81. (Consent)	Astor Wm. W.	42nd St. Manhattanville & St. Nicholas Ave. R.R. Co.
3/1/1956 Liber 4955, page 656.	Astor John Jacob (Tr. of) Astor Michael L. (Tr. of) Astor Francis D.L. (Tr. of) Astor William W. (Tr. of)	Sheraton-Astor Corp.

City Bank Farmers Trust Co.  
(as Tr. of all above)

3/1/1956     Astor   John Jacob     Declaration and consent  
Liber 4955,  
page 652.

3/4/1958     Sheraton Ambassador Corp.     Iacovone, Rose  
Liber 5031, Sheraton Astor Corp.  
page 625.

3/4/1958     Iacovone   Rose     Lubin   Evelyn  
Liber 5031     Eisner   Helen  
page 636.

6/3/1958     Lubin   Evelyn     Astor Assocs.  
Liber 5040, Eisner   Helen  
page 9.

7/6/1966     Astor Assocs.     Seconex Properties Inc.  
Liber 78,  
page 185.

7/6/1966     Seconex Properties Inc.     Minskoff   Henry H.  
Liber 78,     Minskoff   Jerome  
page 211.     Minskoff   Myron  
                 Golding   Samuel  
                 Golding   Jerrold

12/29/1966     Golding   Samuel H.     Ostar Props. Inc.  
Liber 356.     Golding   Jerrold R.

2. Date of erection: Begun 1902 and opened September, 1904.
3. Architects: Clinton & Russell; Charles W. Clinton (1838-1910) and William Hamilton Russell (1856-1907).
4. Builder, suppliers: John Downey was the builder. The interior decoration was designed by the architects. The ornamental plaster work was carried out by Mr. Ringelke; and the following artists executed work on the interior: W. De Leftwich Dodge, Alexander Malcolm, Carlson T. Chapman, A. C. Rahn, Emens and Unitt, and Paul Grafe. The public rooms were furnished by W. & J. Sloan, and the bedrooms and suites by John Wanamaker.
5. Original plan and construction of building: The original part of the Hotel Astor extended along Broadway for 200 feet and from Broadway along West 44th and West 45th Streets to a depth of 160 feet. It was built at a cost of approximately seven million dollars, including five million dollars for the structure itself and \$700,000 for

the movable furniture. In the sub-basement, basement, and on the ground floor were a great variety of dining and public rooms. The second through ninth floors contained bedrooms and suites; there were about six hundred bedrooms and four hundred baths. On the eleventh floor were private dining rooms and two banquet halls. The building was topped by a roof garden. Each of the dining and public rooms, as well as many of the suites, were decorated in a distinct style, ranging from the Romanesque wine cellars to the Louis XVI banquet hall.

6. Additions and alterations: After the hotel had been in operation for a few years, it became evident that more rooms for social purposes were needed. In 1909-10 an addition, one hundred feet deep, was erected at the rear of the hotel, making the total depth of the building from the Broadway facade 260 feet. This addition provided the ultimately distinctive characteristics of the Hotel Astor--the large and flexible ballroom facilities on the ground floor where so many of the great balls, dinners, and other events of that era were held, and the extensive roof garden with the 200 foot long Belvedere Restaurant overlooking the Hudson River and cooled by a continuous stream of water flowing over the glazed roof hung with ferns and greenery. The addition also increased the total number of bedrooms to one thousand and bathrooms to seven hundred. Clinton & Russell designed the addition, and the ballroom decor was executed by Unitt & Wickes. The south end of the ballroom contained a large movable stage operated by an Otis elevator. In addition to the stage, sections of the floor along the gallery to the west of the Grand Ballroom could be electrically raised disclosing a series of revolving trays which brought food up from the kitchen below and facilitated the serving of large banquets.

Throughout the years the hotel was altered in various ways. The following material on alterations was obtained from the Plans Desk, Buildings Department, Municipal Building, New York:

On April 23, 1921, Peabody, Wilson & Brown Architects received approval to carry out these alterations at an estimated cost of \$150,000. "First floor framing and floor arches removed on Southeast and Northeast corners of building from main Broadway entrances to entrances on 44th and 45th streets"; new flooring was to be installed; new mezzanine level added; and store fronts installed along facades of 44th and 45th Streets and Broadway. On 44th and 45th Streets the sidewalks were to be extended up to the building, and miscellaneous changes were to be made to internal partitions.

On December 17, 1927, Peabody, Wilson & Brown received approval to cut back the entrance canopies to the new curb line; new canopies were to be "hung from columns in wall of building," and "Old vault lights, vents curbing and rail around same to be removed." The estimated cost of this work was \$50,000.

This same firm had another application approved on September 4, 1928, to remove two old marquees and to install two new ones. For this work the cost was estimated at \$10,000. This firm received approval on September 3, 1931, for alterations to the southwest corner to change three stores into one large store; this work was estimated to cost \$10,000.

On May 9, 1934, Peabody, Wilson & Brown were granted permission to change a cigar store at the northwest corner of the hotel into a restaurant; the "Only structural change is one enlarged masonry opening with new lintel."

Wilson and Rahm, Architects, submitted proposals for alterations estimated to cost \$15,000. Included in this work was the removal of two piers, installation of new columns and girders, and replacement of glass with metal in the old marquee, all on the Broadway entrance. At the 45th Street entrance new windows were to be installed, and both 44th and 45th Street entrances were to have a new wall finish. This application was approved on September 17, 1935.

Applications for various minor modifications to the store fronts were made in 1938, 1941, 1945, and 1949; and on March 29, 1949, two applications were made involving alterations to the entrance including the erection of new marquees at a combined cost of \$24,000.

The following list of alterations is paraphrased from information provided by William Muschenheim, F.A.I.A., the son of the first proprietor of the Astor, William Muschenheim. (Letter from William Muschenheim, F.A.I.A., Ann Arbor, Michigan, January 5, 1970.)

- a. The floor of the Orangerie was raised to provide additional reception and coat room space and toilet facilities to serve the Grand Ballroom.
- b. Columns were removed and roof (ceiling) of the Belvedere was raised to provide an unobstructed space 200' by approximately 60' for dining, banquets and other functions. This space could be subdivided into five separate spaces.

- c. North and south enclosed gardens were added on the top floor with new coat rooms and reception rooms to increase the banquet and reception facilities.
- d. Elevators and elevator penthouses were modernized.
- e. New coat rooms and access corridors for ballrooms were added on the tenth floor.
- f. There were numerous modernizations and redecorations of existing facilities including a new bar and cafe after the repeal of prohibition.

Mr. Muschenheim describes these alterations as taking place in the late 1920's and early 1930's and costing close to \$3,000,000.

7. Important old views:

- a. The Museum of the City of New York has two exterior photographs by Byron dated 1909, as well as a group of interior photographs.
- b. Aerial photograph taken from the east of Times Square area from 42nd to 45th Streets, dated September, 1926, at the New York Historical Society.
- c. Three old postcards of Times Square, possibly from the 1930's, New York Historical Society.
- d. Poster of "Hotel Astor, Times Square, New York," in the Landauer Collection, New York Historical Society. (See HABS photocopy.)

B. Sources of Information:

1. Unpublished sources:

Letter from William Muschenheim, F.A.I.A., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, to A. Craig Morrisson, Historic American Buildings Survey, Washington, D.C., January 5, 1970.

Records from the Plans Desk, Buildings Department, Municipal Building, New York, New York.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Clinton & Russell, Holton & George. Clinton & Russell, Holton & George, Architects. 192? (Promotion pamphlet.)

- Description of American Indian Room, Hotel Astor. (A brochure, available at the New York Public Library.)
- "Dinner Under Ground at New Astor Hotel," The New York Times, August 29, 1904, p. 7.
- Dougan, James. "Engineering Features of the Hotel Astor," The New York Architect, III (December, 1909), pp. 15-16.
- George, T. J. "Hotel Astor," The New York Architect, III (December, 1909), pp. 10-15.
- "George Washington Would Have Slept Here," Progressive Architecture, XLVII (March, 1966), pp. 56-57.
- "The Hotel Astor," Architects' and Builders' Magazine, VI (November, 1904), pp. 49-71.
- "The Hotel Astor Addition," Architects' and Builders' Magazine, n.s. X (February, 1910), pp. 197-206.
- "Hotel Astor, Long Acre Square, New York," Architecture, IX (September, 1904), plate LXVII.
- "Hotel Astor Opens," The New York Times, September 2, 1904, p. 7.
- Hutchin, William. "New York Hotels. II. The Modern Hotel," The Architectural Record, XII (November, 1902), pp. 621-35.
- "New Addition to Hotel Astor, New York," The American Architect, XCVII (January 19, 1910), 2 plates.
- "The Orangery, Hotel Astor," The American Architect and Building News, LXXXVII (June 17, 1905), 2 plates.
- Rider, Fremont (gen. ed.). Rider's New York City, A Guide Book for Travelers. 2nd ed. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1924.
- Schoszberger, Otto Felix. "Das Hotel Astor in New-York," Wiener Bauindustrie Zeitung, XXII (Jahrgang, 1905), pp. 135-39 and plates 35-40.
- "Seven Millions Built This Huge Hotel Pile," The New York Times, July 10, 1904, p. 12.
- Stokes, I.N.P. The Iconography of Manhattan Island 1498-1909. New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1915.
- "2 Hotels Succumb to City's Endless Change, Astor Shuts Its Doors--Waits Wreckers," The New York Times, June 30, 1966, p. 41.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural interest and merit: The Hotel Astor was widely known for its richly decorated exterior and interior features. It was acclaimed for its fire-proof construction and for its many technical innovations, including an incinerator, thermostats in each room, and cool air-conditioning.
2. Condition of fabric: Undergoing demolition.

B. Description of Exterior:

Note: Because of the demolition work being conducted at the time of this report, it was not possible to see the first floor facade or any part of the building above the seventh floor. The description of these sections was taken from HABS photographs taken before demolition work was begun.

1. Number of stories: Nine stories including main floor mezzanine with two stories under the mansard roof. The roof-top garden and banqueting rooms brings the total height to twelve stories.
2. Number of bays: The Broadway facade measures approximately 200'-0" and consists of a projecting section at each end which is three bays wide and a center section which is seven bays wide, making a total of thirteen bays. The original building extended along West 44th and West 45th Streets approximately 161'-8" and was eleven bays wide. The addition of 1910 increased the depth of the building to sixteen bays, making the total depth of the building from Broadway approximately 261'-8".
3. Layout, shape: The building is rectangular in plan.
4. Wall construction, finish and color: The first three stories are of limestone. Above this the walls are of dark red brick laid up in common bond. There are stone courses between the seventh and eighth floors, and there are stone quoins at the corners of the building.
5. Structural system: The frame of the original structure is cast iron.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways: The main entrance is in the central bay of the Broadway facade; there are side entrances on both the West 44th and West 45th Street facades.



- b. Windows: In the projecting end sections of the Broadway facade on the third through seventh floors and on the ninth floor, the windows have one-over-one light double hung sash; windows on the eighth floor are similar but are segmental-arched. On the third floor there is one narrow window between bays; on the fourth floor the windows have arched stone pediments. Windows on floors four through eight have quoined stone architraves with stone panels between floors. Between seventh and eighth floors are stone balconets without railings.

In the center section of the Broadway facade, at the third floor level there are alternating square- and round-headed windows which open onto a carved stone balcony. Windows on floors above are all rectangular, except for the eighth floor where they are segmental-arched, and have one-over-one light double hung sash. On the fourth floor the two end bays have an ornate stone cartouche while the five center bays have arched pediments with cartouches. Windows on floors four through eight have quoined stone architraves and stone panels between floors. On the seventh floor the two end bays have rusticated stone keystones, and the central bays have cartouches with brackets at the side. On the eighth floor all windows have stone balconets without railings, except for the two end bays which have iron grilles. Between the five central bays on floors four through eight are single, narrow windows.

On the West 44th and West 45th Street facades, the window scheme is similar to that on the projecting wings of the Broadway facade, except for small, narrow windows between bays.

All windows have stone lintels and sills, except for the narrow windows between bays which have brick lintels.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Shingled, mansard roof.
- b. Dormers: There is one level of bull's-eye windows with stone surrounds along the West 44th and West 45th Street facades and along the projecting end sections of the Broadway facade. There are two levels of similar dormers along the center section of the Broadway facade.

C. Description of Interior:

Note: Because of the demolition work, it was impossible to gain access to the interior. However, an impression of the original appearance of the hotel can be gained from these articles:

"The Hotel Astor," Architects' and Builders' Magazine, VI  
(November, 1904), pp. 49-71.

"The Hotel Astor Addition," Architects' and Builders' Magazine,  
n.s. X (February, 1910), pp. 197-206.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. Orientation and general setting: The Broadway facade faces east.
2. Sidewalks: Concrete, contiguous to building.

Prepared by Diana S. Waite  
Architectural Historian  
National Park Service  
February 1968